

# **Towards an Ecological View of Special Education for Rural and Indigenous Areas**

**Guadalupe Acle Tomasini<sup>1</sup>, Maria del Pilar Roque Hernández<sup>1</sup>, and Eduardo Contreras Ramírez<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Division, Faculty of Higher Studies, Zaragoza, *Autónoma* National University of Mexico, Mexico/D.F.

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Higher Studies, Zaragoza, *Autónoma* National University of Mexico, Mexico/D.F.

---

**Mexico**

[gaclet@servidor.unam.mx](mailto:gaclet@servidor.unam.mx)

## Abstract

**Introduction.** Ecological models which address educational phenomena propose that students are involved in multiple environments where they play different roles. In each environment they are expected to show certain behaviors; sometimes this can create conflicts, perhaps due to a discrepancy between the individual's skill in meeting the requirements of that environment, or because the environment does not meet the individual's needs. From this perspective, this study seeks to determine how special educational needs are manifest in indigenous children at the beginning of their formal schooling, as well as to analyze the relationship between such needs and the various environmental forces which surround the youngsters.

**Method.** Our methodology was in part qualitative, using ethnographic techniques through which we recorded data from the school, family and cultural contexts. Quantitative methodology was used in the application of a psychological instrument to 96 Otomi children, 50 boys and 46 girls. Results were correlated with different variables such as parents' occupation, parents' literacy, and the child's gender and age.

**Results.** We describe discrepancies between the child's skills acquired at home and those required at school. Both quantitative and qualitative data which we collected document difficulties exhibited by the Otomi children when entering primary education: significant differences in use of skills are found between those who repeat the grade and who take preschool, and those who do not. The cultural and family environment limits educational expectations as well as how long the children remain in school.

**Discussion.** Using an ecological approach for detecting special educational requirements in children from rural and indigenous areas, and for addressing them accordingly, reveals the need to include other variables for analysis. The interaction of these variables with the child makes it possible to gain a better understanding of this particular issue. Clearly the task is not easy, but responsibility for these difficulties should not continue to be focused on the child, particularly in these populations where improper application and interpretation of tests can add yet another element of [marginalization](#): that of disability.

**Keywords:** Special needs, educational ecology, native populations, evaluation.

**[This Article is in Translation]**